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C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 000202

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/ERA, NEA/ELA, AND EUR/NB

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SUBJECT: FINLAND'S RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON EU DESIGNATION
OF HIZBALLAH AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

REF: STATE 26062 [NOTAL]

Classified By: Ambassador Earle I. Mack for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶11. (C) Embassy delivered reftel demarche February 14 to Jarno Syrjala, MFA's "regional director" for Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority in its Middle East Unit, and to Juha Rainne of the Unit for Public International Law. On the same day, Ambassador met with Israel Ambassador Tzur, who gave us a copy of the Israeli government's separate demarche to EU countries with details on Hizballah's support for Palestinian terrorist groups.

¶12. (C) In a follow-up conversation February 15, after the death of former Lebanese PM Hariri, Syrjala told us that Finland "is not keen" on designating Hizballah as a terrorist organization at the February 16 Clearinghouse meeting, but would not oppose it either. Syrjala said that if the issue were only Hizballah's connection with Palestinian terrorists, Finland would vote for designation, but the Finns are worried about the effect such a step would have on Lebanese parliamentary politics -- doubly so after the Hariri assassination. They see Hizballah MPs as still having a role to play in Lebanon's national reunification process, and until it is clearer who was behind the assassination, the GoF is feeling quite cautious about any new moves.

¶13. (C) Syrjala also commented on the information supplied by the Israeli Government in its separate demarche, terming it "less informative than articles in Ha'aretz." He said that a "credible picture" is needed of the links between Hizballah and the rejectionist groups if the U.S. and EU are to take effective joint action.

¶14. (C) Syrjala said that the February 21 meeting of the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council probably will release separate statements on the events in Lebanon and on the Middle East peace process. A proposal for a single, combined statement was vetoed at the February 15 PSC meeting, since the EU does not want to imply that there is any connection.

MACK